England. — Churches, etc. — Baptists.
1129
— Midland Association

CIRCULAR LETTER.

THE

ELDERS AND MESSENGERS

OF THE SEVERAL

BAPTIST CHURCHES,

MEETING FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AT

BIRMINGHAM, *Bond-ſtreet*,
DITTO, *Cannon-ſtreet*,
COPPICE,
COSELY,
DUDLEY,
EVESHAM,
LEOMINSTER,
PERSHORE,
RYEFORD,
SHIFFNALL,
WOLVERHAMPTON, and
SHREWSBURY.

Having alſo received LETTERS from

BEWDLEY,
BRETTLE LANE,
WILLENHALL, and
WORCESTER *.

BEING MET IN ASSOCIATION AT

SHIFFNALL, in SHROPSHIRE,

May 29 *and* 30, 1798;

Maintaining the important Doctrines of Three equal Perſons in the Godhead; —eternal and perſonal Election;—original Sin;—particular Redemption; —free Juſtification by the Righteouſneſs of Chriſt imputed;—efficacious Grace in Regeneration;—the final Perſeverance of the Saints;—the Reſurrection of the Dead;—the general Judgment at the laſt Day;—the Life everlaſting;—and the Independence of their reſpective Churches.

To the ſeveral Chriſtian Societies they repreſent.

* Letters from the Churches at TEWKESBURY and UPTON did not arrive at SHIFFNALL till the day after the Aſſociation had cloſed.

CIRCULAR LETTER.

DEAR BRETHREN,

AFTER the pleaſing ſolemnities of another annual meeting, we affectionately renew our annual addreſs.

We have, for the moſt part, invited your attention to one particular theme, and endeavored to ſtate and defend ſuch views of an individual truth, or duty, as we judged to be contained in that ſacred volume, by whoſe deciſions we all profeſs to be directed. You will allow us this year to offer more varied advice. May the Father of Mercies help you to receive and follow it.

Firſt. Let us earneſtly beſeech you to HALLOW THE SABBATHS OF THE LORD. Sincerely do we lament the almoſt univerſal violation of the divine command, to keep the Sabbath holy; but it is not our preſent concern to "judge them that are without." It is with profeſſors of chriſtianity that we have to do; with *you*, who have publicly put on CHRIST, and, in a manner the moſt ſolemn, vowed ſubjection to his will, and conformity to his example: and it is with double grief that we perceive, among thoſe who call themſelves the followers of CHRIST, ſome who pay but little deference to the day which bears his name, which commemorates his reſurrection, which his immediate followers religiouſly obſerved, and a day on which his worſhip, by all denominations of chriſtians, is ſtill maintained; a day which he has honored above all other days, by the outpouring of his ſpirit, and the manifeſtation

feſtation of his preſence and his power. We beſeech you, brethren, "follow not a multitude to do evil:" make not this a day of merchandize, of viſiting, or of journies, the importance of whoſe object will not fully juſtify your undertaking them. We preſs this duty the more upon you, becauſe we have invariably obſerved, that where profeſſors have begun with neglecting the peculiar duties of the Lord's-day, a looſe walk and converſation have invariably followed; and you need not be told that a breach of the ſabbath brings guilt upon the mind, cauſes the divine preſence to be withdrawn, ſhuts the mouth that ought meekly to reprove other offenders, and hardens in infidelity many unbelievers who compare your conduct with your profeſſion.

Secondly. We intreat you to REVERENCE THE LORD'S SANCTUARY. Not only avoid worldly purſuits on the Lord's-day, but give a *public teſtimony* of your veneration for your GOD. Nothing is more natural or juſt than that thoſe who are under common obligations to their heavenly father, ſhould in common make their grateful acknowledgments; "Forſake not, therefore, the aſſembling of yourſelves together." Be regular and early in your attendance on the worſhip of GOD; let no noiſy rudeneſs on the one hand, nor lethargic indulgence on the other, make your preſence painful to your miniſter, or offenſive to pious worſhippers around you; and, in order to avoid the latter evil, we wiſh ſuch of you as feel an inclination to drowſineſs on the Lord's-day, to conſider whether moderating the indulgence of your ſenſual appetite, would not be friendly to your more decent behavior and ſpiritual improvement.

Thirdly. We intreat you not merely to maintain a blameleſs appearance abroad, but alſo SERIOUSLY TO OBSERVE THE DUTIES OF RELIGION AT HOME. Take heed

heed that none of you live in the neglect of FAMILY DEVOTION. Conſider yourſelves as, in a meaſure, entruſted with the ſouls of all beneath your roof, and ſuffer them not to ſuſtain an injury through want of counſel, prayer, or example in you. O that it may be your reſolution, as it was JOSHUA's, that you and your houſe will, as far as you have influence, ſeek and ſerve the Lord.

Fourthly. We would preſs upon you AN EXTENSIVE AND CLOSE ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE WORD OF GOD. You know who hath commanded that we "Search the ſcriptures," and that we are exhorted to "Let the word of CHRIST dwell richly in us in all wiſdom." An enlarged acquaintance with the holy ſcriptures, will be a moſt likely mean of ſecuring you from thoſe deiſtical principles, and ungodly practices, into which many, who were once zealous profeſſors, have awfully fallen. Our *younger brethren* we would particularly exhort to imitate the noble Bereans, who "ſearched the ſcriptures daily;" accompanied with fervent ſupplications for the influence of the Holy Spirit, without whoſe teaching we ſhall fall ſhort of ſaving knowledge.

Fifthly. Be perſuaded to "watch unto prayer, and continue therein with thankſgiving." This ſacred practice will promote your deadneſs to the world, and nonconformity thereto; whilſt you will be more and more "transformed by the renewing of your minds," and be kept in a divine tranquility, amidſt the convulſions which now agitate the world.

Sixthly. In all things "let your converſation be as becometh the goſpel of CHRIST;" that is, with all uprightneſs and integrity, all kindneſs and benevolence, all meekneſs and patience, reſignation, diligence, and purity; ſo will you ſtop the mouths of gainſayers; prove a comfort

fort and a credit to your reſpective ſocieties; and convince the obſerving world, that "the grace of GOD, which bringeth ſalvation, teacheth to deny ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, and to live righteouſly, and ſoberly, and godly in the preſent world;" whilſt your evidence of intereſt in all the invaluable bleſſings of grace, will be more evident and more decided.

May you affectionately receive our counſels! and may the grace of our Lord JESUS CHRIST be with you all for ever! Amen.

THOMAS HARRISSON, *Moderator.*

AFTER the public ſervice, the Elders and Meſſengers converſed on the duty of individual chriſtians, and chriſtian ſocieties, to exert themſelves, more generally, for the advancement of the dear Redeemer's kingdom, in neighboring villages; and on the beſt means to be adopted in order to ſo important an end; when, it appearing that ſome of the churches in the connexion had made ſome ſucceſsful efforts, it was propoſed to ſubjoin a brief account of the ſteps they had taken, and the pleaſing reſult; in hope that their ſucceſs might encourage our brethren in other places to ſimilar exertions.

Toward the cloſe of the year 1796, one of our brethren having preached twice at a farm-houſe near a village about five miles from the town where he reſides, was encouraged to take a dwelling-houſe in the village, for the purpoſe of public worſhip, which he immediately let, for half the rent he gave, to decent people, on condition of their keeping it clean and ready for divine ſervice whenever wanted. He, and other miniſters, preached there regularly once a fortnight,

night, on a week evening, for ſome months, and many attended with ſerioufneſs on the word of life. At length it ſeemed deſirable to have ſervice there on Lord's-days, eſpecially as there was no place for religious worſhip, of any deſcription, within two miles of the place; and our brother propoſed to the *members of the church*, to aſſiſt in the good work, when above thirty of them agreed to go in their turns on a Lord's-day evening, three at a time, and pray, ſing, read, and occaſionally give exhortation to the congregation. This practice has been adopted with ſucceſs; from fifty to eighty regularly attend, and ſome with a degree of concern that affords abundant ſatisfaction to their pious viſitors. Not long ſince, it appeared that a part of his congregation, who lived at another village about three miles diſtant, were deſirous of religious inſtruction nearer home, in hope that their neighbors might be induced to attend, to whoſe ſalvation the Lord might be pleaſed to bleſs the word; accordingly three neighboring miniſters agreed to preach there once a fortnight. Nearly an hundred people ſeriouſly attend, and the proſpect of uſefulneſs is at preſent very encouraging.

Another of our brethren having mentioned to his people, during the adminiſtration of the Lord's ſupper, about the middle of laſt ſummer, ſome accounts which he had ſeen in the Evangelical Magazine, relative to the ſucceſs that had attended reading the ſcriptures and praying with ſome villagers in Buckinghamſhire, a ſpirit of zeal ſeemed to be poured out on the church, who immediately began prayer meetings for divine direction, and then invited any members who were diſpoſed, to propoſe themſelves for pious viſits to the villages. Seventeen brethren gave in their names, from whom, under the direction of a committee formed for the purpoſe, ſeveral have been ſent to four villages; in two of which, beſides public worſhip,

worſhip, they have eſtabliſhed SUNDAY SCHOOLS, wherein ſeveral poor children have been taught to read and write. In one of theſe ſchools thirty children are inſtructed, and about eighteen adults regularly attend divine ſervice; in the other, forty children are taught, and nearly one hundred adults attend on worſhip. In the villages where there are no ſchools, the attendants are from thirty to forty in each place. The bleſſing of the Lord hath evidently followed theſe labors of love: in one village a general reformation has taken place, although it was before remarkable for its vice and immorality; and there are ſeveral perſons who appear truly converted to GOD.

Among the brethren who have viſited theſe villages, two have diſcovered ſuitable gifts for the miniſtry, and have accordingly been called to that ſacred work by their brethren. Thus, whilſt theſe chriſtian efforts open a field for uſefulneſs to all the diſciples of JESUS, they ſerve to manifeſt thoſe concealed qualifications which may hereafter prove eminently uſeful in his church.

The Sunday Schools have been of conſiderable ſervice, not merely in improving the knowledge and morals of the children, but of conciliating alſo the regards of the inhabitants at large, whoſe hoſtility ſeems turned into friendſhip. The plan is therefore earneſtly recommended to our brethren throughout the churches, who may learn from experience that thoſe who continue in well-doing, in due time ſhall reap, if they faint not.

BREVIATES.

TUESDAY evening. Met at VI. Brother SMITH, of Wolverhampton, prayed; letters from the churches were read, and the Moderator cloſed the meeting with prayer.

WEDNESDAY morning (VII). Brother POPE prayed; a letter was read from the church at Shrewſbury, propoſing an union to the Aſſociation—the propoſal was cheerfully admitted.

Reſolved,

Reſolved, That in future the paſtors of the aſſociated churches be requeſted to preach one of the ſermons on theſe occaſions in regular ſucceſſion, from the ſenior to the junior paſtor—the other preacher to be nominated by the church where the Aſſociation is held for that year, as uſual.

Brother HARRISSON read the Circular Letter; which being approved, was ordered to be printed; brother WILKS prayed.

Half paſt X. Public worſhip began. Brother WILLIAMS, of Ryeford, prayed; brother EDMONDS, of Birmingham, preached from ii. Chron. xxv. 8, "God hath power to help;" after ſinging, brother PEARCE preached from John xiv. 27, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." Brother BUTTERWORTH concluded with prayer.

Met again at IV. Brother WEBSTER prayed; brother PALMER, of Shrewſbury, gave an highly intereſting account of his itinerancy together with brother SMITH, of Coſely, under the patronage of the LONDON BAPTIST ITINERATING SOCIETY, through ſome parts of Wales, and the Engliſh counties adjoining, for three weeks previous to this meeting.

The relation of the ſupports and encouragements granted by our dear Lord to his ſervants, greatly comforted and refreſhed our hearts, and excited a reſolution in many of us to be more active in his bleſſed cauſe.

Half paſt VI. Public worſhip began again. Brother PALMER prayed; brother SMITH, of Alceſter, preached from i. Pet. iv. 18, "And if the righteous ſcarcely be ſaved, where ſhall the ungodly and the ſinner appear." Brother SMITH, of Coſely, concluded the ſervice in prayer.

State of the Churches ſince the laſt Aſſociation.

INCREASE.		DECREASE.	
Baptiſm and Experience	131	Letters of Diſmiſſion -	7
Letter - - - - -	5	Excluſion - -	28
Reſtored - - - -	1	Death - - -	17
	137		52
Clear Increaſe - -	85.		

The Double Lectures for the enſuing year to be obſerved as follows:

1. Hook Norton - - July 24, 1798.
2. Coſely - - Oct. 3, 1798.
3. Leominſter - - April 12, 1799.

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The next Aſſociation to be held at Wolverhampton, on Tueſday and Wedneſday in the Whitſun week. Brethren BUTTERWORTH and BELSHER to preach; in caſe of failure, brother PALMER.

☞ Put up at the Red Lion.

BELCHER, Printer, Birmingham.